

St Alban's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100036
Local Authority	Camden
Inspection number	323217
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Alison Storey HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	211
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Howard Levett
Headteacher	Miss Mary Thorne
Date of previous school inspection	29 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Baldwins Gardens Holborn London EC1N 7SD
Telephone number	020 7242 8585

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Inspection number	323217

Fax number

020 7242 2285

Age group	3-11
Inspection dates	14-15 January 2009
Inspection number	323217

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Alban's is a smaller than average school serving an inner-city area. The very large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic groups, with just over half having Bangladeshi heritage. Around one in eight pupils have a Black African background, the vast majority of these being from refugee families. Most pupils speak English as an additional language. There are 26 languages spoken in the school; the main ones are Bengali and Arabic and 93 pupils are at an early stage of learning English. Nearly half the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, a proportion much higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the national average; most commonly these pupils have speech, language and communication needs. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs is twice the national average. The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school during the year is higher than found nationally.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision is made through the school's 26-place Nursery, which children attend on a full-time basis, and the Reception class. The school runs a breakfast club and a range of after-school clubs for pupils from Year 1 upwards.

The current headteacher took up post in January 2007; two thirds of the teachers have joined the school since the last inspection.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The parent who said 'I believe this school is going from strength to strength' was absolutely right. There have been appreciable improvements since the last inspection because the new headteacher, working with her senior team, has focused on improving the quality of education for pupils and the progress that they make. As a result, St Alban's is now a good school and has the potential to be even better.

The school successfully combines its Christian values of faith, hope and love with celebrating its multicultural, multi-faith community to develop pupils' respect for others and their ability to work and play together harmoniously. Developing pupils' personal and social skills and encouraging them to take responsibility for themselves and others, are threads which run through its everyday work just as much as ensuring that they enjoy their learning and achieve well. As a result, pupils' enjoyment of school is outstanding. They are full of praise for the school, and participate in its life and work with energy and enthusiasm. The school is truly inclusive; it regularly reviews all aspects of its work to ensure that it is meeting the needs of all groups of pupils and makes changes where necessary. Most parents are fully supportive of the school and appreciative of its work. However, not all of them respond to the school's best efforts to encourage good attendance and punctuality. Attendance has improved since the last inspection but remains just below average. A few pupils persistently arrive late in the morning, meaning that they miss vital learning time.

Achievement is good. Pupils generally enter the school with much lower skills than those expected for their age; most speak little or no English and many have had no pre-school experience. The existing good quality of the provision in the EYFS, together with the improvements seen across the school since the last inspection, combine to help all pupils make good progress. There has been considerable improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection, so that almost all lessons are now good. Pupils' progress is carefully and regularly assessed and the curriculum is well matched to their needs. As a result, by the time they leave the school at Year 6, standards in reading, mathematics and science are broadly average. Standards in writing are still below average. This is largely because pupils' writing skills on entry are often lower, because many have a limited range of experiences to write about, and because the school has rightly focused on improving pupils' reading first in order to develop the basic skills they need for writing. The school is already taking well-planned action to make improvements.

Much has been achieved since the last inspection. Everybody involved with the school pays tribute to the inspirational leadership of the new headteacher. She has successfully developed the capacity of senior and middle leaders to help bring about change. Staff and pupils alike appreciate being involved in discussions about future improvements. As one parent said, 'It is exciting to anticipate the future developments that she will inevitably introduce.'

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get off to a good start in EYFS. Home visits for every child help staff, children and their parents to get to know each other and form good relationships. Children are happy to come into school each morning; the classrooms are welcoming, exciting places to be and routines are well established, encouraging children to be independent. The experienced EYFS leader

leads the team of staff well, ensuring that children are well cared for and that there is good provision for their learning and personal development. Children experience a range of activities both indoors and outside in all the areas of learning. Sometimes adults work with them to develop their learning through talking and asking questions. At other times, children choose from a selection of activities and develop their skills to work either independently or with other children.

Regular observations give the staff a clear picture of what children can do, which they use to plan the next steps in learning. Staff are good at both providing the support that individuals need and quickly identifying any learning difficulties. As a result, children make good progress from low starting points, although the range of skills they have when they move to Year 1 is still below those expected of five-year-olds.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement planned strategies to raise standards in writing.
- Work with parents to improve attendance and punctuality.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall, the standards reached by pupils have improved since the last inspection. There are fluctuations from year to year because each group of pupils is different, with different starting points. Importantly, all groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are now making good progress. This is due to good teaching and learning, careful and regular tracking of how well each pupil is doing and a good range of additional support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those new to learning English. In particular, the teaching of mathematics and reading has improved since the last inspection. As a result, in 2008 most pupils at Year 2 and Year 6 reached the expected level for their age, although the proportions reaching the higher levels were lower than found nationally. The picture was similar in science. However, standards in writing were still below those found nationally. The school's tracking of pupils' progress this academic year, and the progress seen in lessons and pupils' work during the inspection, show that the current focus on improving the teaching of writing and broadening the experiences that pupils can draw on, is already bringing about improvement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Behaviour is good; pupils readily become absorbed in their work and are eager to do well in lessons. They have a keen sense of right and wrong and show high levels of respect for each other's feelings and beliefs. They take opportunities to reflect on wider matters and appreciate the diverse cultural make-up of the school. They think the school is a safe place and are clear that cases of bullying and racial harassment are rare. Nevertheless, they know that such matters must be reported and are confident that they will be dealt with effectively. The school council is a very active and vocal group. Those elected understand their responsibilities to their classmates and represent their views well. They have made a number of recommendations that have improved the life and work of the school. Pupils contribute to the wider community through fundraising and contributions to charity.

Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and the need for a balanced diet and regular exercise. The good progress they make in developing their literacy and numeracy skills prepares them well for the next stage in life. Attendance remains just below average because a small but noticeable minority of families take extended trips abroad or do not bring their children to school regularly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The focus on improving teaching and learning through training for teachers and regular monitoring of lessons has been successful. Pupils really enjoy learning because they have good relationships with their teachers and lessons are planned to capture their interest. Activities are planned to challenge pupils of different abilities. Teachers make sure that pupils understand what they are learning and how well they are doing. There is a brisk pace to lessons and a good balance between times when the teachers are talking, opportunities for pupils to take part in discussions and teachers' questioning to check pupils' understanding.

Occasionally learning is not quite as good because the focus on what the pupils are learning is not as clear, or the teacher talks rather than questioning the pupils to check their understanding and develop their thinking.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Quite rightly, there has been an emphasis on English and mathematics, which has included the provision of additional support for pupils at risk of underachievement. This has been successful in ensuring that pupils make good progress in these subjects. The focus now is on developing philosophical skills to help them articulate their thoughts and opinions, and developing the use of dance, drama, music and art to enrich learning and broaden the experiences that pupils have which they can draw on for their writing. Pupils with particular gifts and talents in these areas are encouraged, and their work celebrated. Lunchtime and after-school clubs are very popular, as are the residential trips for the older pupils. The school sensitively brings together its own Christian ethos with the cultural diversity of the local community, and adds links with a rural school and learning about other countries to nurture pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff provide high levels of care, guidance and support for their pupils. All required procedures are securely in place to ensure that pupils work and play in safe surroundings. Teachers and senior staff know each individual pupil well. Staff have a good understanding of the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the pupils and take great care to ensure that all pupils feel valued, safe and secure. The identification and support for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a strength. There are robust systems in place to support those pupils who have a combination of learning and pastoral needs. The school takes rigorous steps to promote good attendance and has had some success in reducing absence.

Pupils are well informed about the progress they make in lessons. Teachers share with pupils what they will be learning and how they will know if they have been successful and increasingly encourage them to assess how well they are doing themselves. Work is marked thoroughly; there are some excellent examples of feedback which make it clear to pupils about the next steps they should take, but this is not yet consistent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. A common sense of purpose and a clear focus on raising standards and cultivating pupils' personal and social skills are shared by the headteacher, senior staff and governors and permeate throughout the staff. Middle leaders have risen to the challenge of taking greater responsibility for school improvement in their short time in post and are starting to influence practice across the school. Staff at all levels really value the culture of professional development and teamwork. The quality of governance is good. Governors are well informed, have a clear picture of what the school does well and where it still needs to improve and effectively discuss how to bring this about.

The school is committed to providing the best for each and every child. Senior leaders regularly review practice to ensure that the school caters equally well for all pupils and adapts it where needed. For example, its analysis that girls of Bangladeshi heritage were at risk of underachievement led to the introduction of strategies such as paired talk to engage them fully in lessons. Accurate assessments and rigorous systems for tracking pupils' progress are now established, which ensure that the school keeps a careful check on how well each child is doing academically. Challenging targets are raising the expectations of the progress pupils should make over time. Senior leaders look carefully with staff at the progress each pupil is making towards these targets each term and ensure that where pupils need extra support they get it sooner rather than later.

The improvements since the last inspection, together with the accurate analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses and focused plans for improvement, demonstrate good capacity to improve further.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

28 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Alban's Church of England Primary School, London, EC1N 7SD

It was lovely to meet you when we came to visit your school. Thank you very much to all of you who spoke to us in lessons, around the school, in the playground and in the special meetings we had. It certainly helped us to find out more about the school.

We know that you really enjoy being at St Alban's and you are right when you say it is a good school. It has improved a lot since the last time inspectors visited. Teachers make sure that your lessons are interesting and challenging. They keep a careful check on how well you are doing in lessons and make sure they give you extra support if you need it. As a result, you are making good progress in your learning. Just as importantly, they take good care of you and encourage you to respect each other's backgrounds and to play and work together harmoniously. (I know some of the older pupils enjoy using big words so I hope you will be able to explain what that means to the younger children!)

Of course, there are always things that can improve, and before we left we talked to your headteacher and others about how to make your school even better. We asked them to make sure that you do as well in writing as you do in reading and mathematics. Secondly, they need to continue to work with your parents to make sure you all attend school regularly and get there on time.

You can help by continuing to be as well behaved and enthusiastic about learning as you were when we were there. If you are one of the pupils who does not always turn up on time in the morning or misses some days, please ask your parents to make sure you are there so that you do not lose valuable minutes or hours of learning!

Yours faithfully

Alison Storey

Her Majesty's Inspector